

The Lyric Voice of Adélia Prado: An Analysis of Themes and Structure in *Bagagem*

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. . . tenho meus prantos,
claridades atrás do meu estômago humilde
e fortíssima voz pra cânticos de festa.

The voice of Adélia Prado: sensitive and strong. It springs from the simplicity of daily life and soars, melodious and true. A woman's voice, a poet's voice, a new lyric voice from Brazil.

Although some of her poems had appeared in periodicals between 1971 and 1975, the totality of Adélia's creative vision first truly revealed itself in the spring of 1976 with the publication of her first volume of poetry, *Bagagem* (Rio de Janeiro: Imago Editora Ltda.). The following study is intended to serve as a general introduction to this beautiful and highly original book—a work which firmly establishes the forty-year-old poet's importance in contemporary Brazilian letters.

Cantiga triste, pode com ela
é quem não perdeu a alegria.

The very title of this brief poem, "Toada," suggests music. Adélia's voice covers an entire range of feelings, from the happy to the sad. Indeed these two extremes, so basic to her universe, are anticipated in the second of five epigraphs in *Bagagem*, a paraphrasing of the sixth verse of Psalm 126, which reads: "'Chorando, chorando, sairão espalhando as sementes. Cantando, cantando, voltarão trazendo os seus feixes.'" In an October 1975 *crônica* Carlos Drummond de Andrade said: "Adélia é lírica, bíblica, existencial, faz poesia como faz bom tempo." Her poetry, imbued with a deep, authentic faith in God, is rooted in the ordinary; from the most minute details of daily life she creates a whole. Through an intuitive process of associations directly related to the senses, she evokes from the present a past which ultimately leads to self-discovery. In a poem entitled "A Cantiga," she recalls the voice of a woman singing a simple folksong:

"Ai cigana, ciganinha,
ciganinha meu amor".

Recreating the memory of this moment she transforms it, incorporating the music into herself:

. . . a voz de bambu rachado
continua tinindo, esganiçada, linda,
viaja pra dentro de mim, o meu ouvido cada vez melhor.

Finally the voice of Adélia cries out:

Canta, canta, mulher, vai polindo o cristal,
canta mais, canta que eu acho minha mãe,
meu vestido estampado, meu pai tirando bóia de panela,
canta que eu acho minha vida.

The many shades of tone found in the poems of *Bagagem* correspond to the volume's extensive range of themes. The over-all tone could be characterized as deeply lyric, but there also appears in a number of her poems an ironic humor which recalls the great Brazilian poets of modernism. Adélia's poetry, highly individual in its totality, incorporates, almost organically, a variety of sources. Her lyricism owes much to the melody and rhythms of the colloquial Portuguese spoken in Minas Gerais. At the same time the influence of the Bible and the echo of Guimarães Rosa are felt throughout her work. In a poem entitled "A Invenção de um modo" Adélia says:

. . . tudo que invento já foi dito
nos dois livros que eu li:
as escrituras de Deus,
as escrituras de João.
Tudo é Biblias. Tudo é Grande Sertão.

The spiritual and linguistic presence of Guimarães Rosa is felt in numerous poems; indeed one, "Poema com absorvências no totalmente perplexas de Guimarães Rosa," is a kind of homage to her compatriot. The poetry of the Bible, especially that of the Psalms and of the Song of Solomon, pervades the pages of *Bagagem*, as does the poetry of the mass and other rituals of Catholic religious practice. In a poem entitled "Reza para as quatro almas de Fernando Pessoa" Adélia reveals a special appreciation for Álvaro de Campos:

Da belíssima "Ode à noite antiga"

she writes,

resulta que eu entendo, limpo de esforço
e vaidade, se nos fosse possível:
da oração verdadeira nasce a força.

The humor found in *Bagagem* recalls the irony and linguistic inventiveness of the Brazilian modernists. Her debt to them is especially visible in the case of her complex relationship to Carlos Drummond. One poem, "Agora, ó José," constitutes a homage to this poet. Its title is taken from the first verse of Drummond's

famous poem, "José." While the character of José is the same, the tone of absolute despair in the original is transformed by Adélia into one of religious hope:

"Tu és pedra e sobre esta pedra".
A pedra, ó José, a pedra.
Resiste, ó José. Deita, José,
dorme com tua mulher,
gira a aldraba de ferro pesadíssima.
O reino do céu é semelhante a um homem
como você, José.

Another poem, entitled "Todos fazem um poema a Carlos Drummond de Andrade," suggests an ambivalent psychological attitude on her part—one tinged with envy along with a desire for approval:

. . . eu tenho inveja de Carlos Drummond de Andrade
apesar de nossas extraordinárias semelhanças.

The feelings she goes on to describe, which can be compared to the love-hate relationship which children have towards their parents, are expressed with irony both towards her master and towards herself. One of the best examples of Adélia's sense of humor is a parody of romanticism entitled "Bilhete (em papel rosa)" and dedicated "*Ao meu amado secreto Castro Alves*."

In language as well as composition Adélia's poetry ranges from the cultured to the popular. Through the frequent use of mental associations and ellipses, she literally leaps from one idea to another, forcing the reader to jump along with her, filling in as best he can, in order to follow the rhythm of her imagination. She has a particular love for words and phrases which she seems to roll over and over in her mind until they come forth anew. Although she often evokes the spirit and metrics of traditional poetic forms, her own style can best be characterized as free verse. In a poem entitled "A Poesia" she herself describes her poetry as "versos de ingrato ritmo."

Thematically the poems of *Bagagem* reflect a series of fundamental dualities which parallel two extremes of the emotional spectrum: sadness and happiness—the *chorando-cantando* alluded to at the beginning of this study. Adélia constantly contrasts the physical and the spiritual, life and death, the present and the past, life on earth and the afterlife, human love and the love of God. Along with these basic dualities is another which, although not specifically expressed, is suggested throughout: the duality of woman-man. These opposites are presented against an exuberant backdrop of nature and of daily life in which the poet's senses act as primary vehicles for communication. The third poem of the volume, entitled "Sensorial," affirms the importance of such an essentially non-intellectual approach in the creative process:

Amor, tem que falar meu bem,
me dar caixa de música de presente,

conhecer vários tons pra uma palavra só

the poet states, emphasizing the importance of music and the spoken word, the role of the ear and voice. Basing herself on the primary contrast between the human as opposed to the divine, she goes on to suggest two ways of dealing with this duality:

Espírito, se for de Deus, eu adoro,
se for de homem, eu testo
com meus seis instrumentos.

Adélia, alive, will use all her senses to capture this life on earth, knowing that eventually she too will pass from sunlight into shadow:

Procuro sol, porque sou bicho de corpo.
Sombra terei depois, a mais fria.

These antitheses do not remain forever separated. Instead they are somehow mysteriously drawn together into a synthesis of optimism and joy. In this process the specific is transformed into the universal, the society and nature of Minas becoming those of the world, Adélia Prado's life and family symbolically representing but one generation in the eternal repetitions of life on earth. It is a synthesis of enormous vitality in which, through love and poetry, joy triumphs over sorrow.

Cantiga triste, pode com ela
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Adélia sang in her "Toada." In this synthesis the biological, social and psychological differences between the female and the male resolve themselves into a harmony which is the human condition. Thus Adélia Prado, "mulher do povo, mãe de filhos, Adélia," as she describes herself in "Grande desejo," is also *o poeta*—the universal bard. As if to emphasize this role she adopts a masculine voice in a number of poems, including the closing one, whose function is of primary importance in the over-all structure of the book. Adélia seeks to capture the eternal, to attain through poetry that mysterious and wonderful union with the Divine sought by King Solomon and the great mystics. The theme of poetry, then, is the backbone of her book—a major leitmotif which constantly reappears throughout. The poet is inspired by God:

. . . mercê de Deus, o poder que eu tenho
é de fazer poesia,

she writes in "Tabaréu." In another wonderful poem, "Antes do nome," where she relates poetic creation to the first chapter of Genesis, Adélia states:

Não me importa a palavra, esta corriqueira.

Quero é o esplêndido caos de onde emerge a sintaxe.

A little further on she writes:

Quem entender a linguagem entende Deus
cujo Filho é Verbo. Morre quem entender.

She approaches the moment of communion by invoking the power of silence:

A palavra é disfarce de uma coisa mais grave, surdamuda,
foi inventada para ser calada.

Finally she captures, briefly, the actual moment of creation, when the poet unites with the word:

Em momentos de graça, infreqüentíssimos,
se poderá apanhá-la: um peixe vivo com a mão.
Puro susto e terror.

Bagagem contains a total of 108 poems, most of them fairly short. The briefest has but two verses and the longest is approximately a page and a half in length. All of the poems bear titles. The book is divided into four main sections: the first with 66 poems—that is to say, over half the entire volume—and the following three all of fairly equal extension. The book itself and each of these sections are introduced by epigraphs which set a religious and lyric tone for the poems to follow. A final (fifth) section, "ALFÂNDEGA," containing but one poem by the same title and not prefaced by an epigraph, serves as a kind of epilogue for the entire work. The contents of the individual sections and of the volume as a whole have been carefully organized so as to create a sense of linear development as well as an essentially circular external structure, as we shall see.

The epigraph for *Bagagem* is an adaptation from *The Canticle of the Creatures* by St. Francis of Assisi "a quem," the poet says, "devo a graça de este livro." St. Francis's song of love to all his "brothers" in nature is transformed by Adélia into a celebration of praise directed to her own book: "*Louvai ao Senhor, livro meu irmão, com vossas letras e palavras, com vosso verso e sentido, com vossa capa e forma, com as mãos de todos que vos fizeram existir, louvai ao Senhor.*" The tone of these words of dedication anticipates the enormous vitality and love of life which fill the entire volume.

The first section, "O MODO POÉTICO," is preceded by the quote from Psalm 126 cited at the start of this study. The duality *chorando-cantando* in this passage suggests that from the pain of sowing seeds will eventually come the joy of harvest, that happiness will triumph over suffering. In effect, this central duality of sadness and happiness (along with its eventual resolution) constitutes the principal theme of "O MODO POÉTICO." It is developed through the use of three major motifs that are alternated

and frequently superimposed. Fundamental to all three, either directly or indirectly, is the poet's spiritual or autobiographical presence, the voice of Adélia which also gives unity to the whole.

The first of these three motifs concerns both personal and universal experiences: life and death, the present and the past, the poet's own internal struggle between the two sides of her personality. Poems dealing with a similar subject matter are grouped in clusters and arranged so as to suggest a process of human growth and maturation that is increasingly intensified throughout the section. Adélia begins by recalling, from the point of view of her own life in the present—a life of joy but at the same time one in which she finds herself existentially alone—her childhood and the death of her parents. These experiences are then presented in more universal terms, underscoring the eternal repetition of all life. Next Adélia turns to her personal struggle with the passage of time and with age, a problem resolved in a poem entitled "Trégua." Following this acceptance of human mortality comes a series of delicate, cloudless poems celebrating life and evoking the past by recreating the simplicity of family life in the country. These poems are filled with color and sounds. Slowly, however, Adélia introduces an element of metamorphosis in which reality is transformed as though seen through dreams. The aura of happiness is symbolically tinged in the poem "Atávica" where Adélia says:

Mas eu vim pra cidade fazer versos tão tristes
que dão gosto, meu Jesus misericórdia.
Por prazer da tristeza eu vivo alegre.

The earlier shadow of sadness now dominates in a series of poems about death. Out of the state of mourning, however, spring hope and the idea of immortality through poetry, as seen in the last verse of "Tarja" which reads:

A poesia, a mais ínfima, é serva da esperança.

Finally sadness and happiness are balanced, and Adélia's inner struggle is presented in psychological terms in which she vacillates between states of calm or "normalcy" and states of nerves. Salvation from this manic-depressive condition can only come from God, as she indicates in the fifth-from-the-last poem, "De profundis":

Quando a noite vier a minh'alma ciclotímica
afundar nos desvãos da água sem porto,
salva-me.

Thus the section will end with a sense of peace and inner knowledge in which, as Adélia writes in "O modo poético," the final poem bearing the same title as that of the section:

Muito maior que a morte é a vida.

In between these clusters of poems, and harmonizing with them, are others which develop the motif of poetry and the poet. In this case, too, Adélia begins with the specific and ends with the universal. In the final poem, for example, she refers to the poet using the generic masculine:

Um poeta sem orgulho é um homem de dores,
muito mais é de alegrias.

Throughout the section Adélia examines various aspects of poetic creation: the poet's relationship to God and grace, the problem of originality, the poet's frustration, the power of poetry upon the poet, poetry as a spiritual guide, poetry as a gift of God, and finally, the poet's role in the universe, as described in the poem "O modo poético":

A seu cripto modo anuncia,
às vezes, quase inaudível,
em delicado código:
"Cuidado, entre as gretas do muro
está nascendo a erva". . . .

One of the most vivid images of how poetry actively forces itself upon the poet is found in the poem "Sedução" in which the poet (male) is seduced by poetry (a flirtatious female). This sensuous celebration of poetic inspiration begins with the poet's being embraced behind a wall:

A poesia me pega com sua roda dentada,
me força a escutar imóvel
o seu discurso esdrúxulo.

After making love, he tries to escape, but poetry is stronger:

Me pega a ponta do pé
e vem até na cabeça,
fazendo sulcros profundos.
É de ferro a roda dentada dela.

Interwoven like a melody throughout this first section of *Bagagem* is the lyric religious motif announced in the epigraph. Indeed the spiritual and the profane are interdependent here, just as they are in the lives of the simple country folk recalled in "O MODO POÉTICO." To create a sense of integration of the two, Adélia most frequently evokes the poetry of the Old Testament or that of the mass and other rituals of the Church. While faith, God and the afterlife are incorporated into the entire section, there are moments when the religious motif is used to create a kind of emotional climax towards the end of a cluster of poems about life. Thus after the death of her parents we find "Saudação," Adélia's own "Hail Mary," and a little further on she comes to terms with death in a poem entitled "Dia de ira."

Amongst the poems celebrating life she includes the joyous "Um Salmo" which ends in a wonderful burst of exaltation:

A nossa alma deseja,
o nosso corpo anseia
o movimento pleno:
cantar e dançar TE-DEUM.

Throughout "O MODO POÉTICO" there are poems which suggest Catholic ceremonies and feast days, such as "Páscoa" and "A Catacúmena," and other poems which evoke religious and spiritual moments. The final poem of the section serves as a summation of all that Adélia has learned from life into which the motifs of poetry and God are totally integrated and resolved.

After the harmonious resolution of the conflicts of poetry, life and the spirit in "O MODO POÉTICO" the volume takes on a feeling of order and certainty that stands in direct contrast to the complexity of the first section. Each of the three sections to follow has a tight thematic unity which gives it autonomy. At the same time, however, the themes of each of these sections are also directly related to "O MODO POÉTICO" in such a way as to suggest that Adélia wished to create a sense of order from chaos.

The 19 poems of the second section, "UM JEITO E O AMOR," are prefaced by a quote, adopted by Adélia, from the Song of Songs, Chapter 2, verse 5: "'Confortai-me com flores, fortalecei-me com frutos, porque desfaleço de amor.'" The love poems of this section will imitate the spirit of the Song of Solomon: by and large they celebrate various kinds of human love, with spiritual love emerging only towards the end. Adélia frequently uses traditional poetic forms and themes, incorporating them into her own style and vision of life so as to induce a feeling of the eternal in the present. The opening poem, "Amor violeta," for instance, is a very contemporary and personal version of Cupid's arrow, recreated in language reminiscent of that of a chemist or pharmacist:

O amor me fere é debaixo do braço,
de um vão entre as costelas.
Atinge o meu coração é por esta via inclinada.
Eu ponho o amor no pilão com cinza
e grão de roxo e soco. Macero ele,
faço dele cataplasma
e ponho sobre a ferida.

In the following poems she evokes different kinds and phases of love such as courtship, physical attraction, rejection, marriage, fantasies, adventure and jealousy. Many of the poems—one might even say those reflecting the second part of the section's double title, "AMOR"—evoke the tone and themes of medieval poetry (one even bears the title "Medievo"). Others, such as the poem "Um Jeito," are more contemporary in tone. Throughout there runs an undercurrent of sensuality in keeping with the theme. The

penultimate poem, "Canção de amor," introduces another tonality to the section. Here Adélia describes the painful death of a man who has cancer (thus anticipating the final section of *Bagagem*), transforming this scene into a modern recounting of the Raising of Lazarus which ends with the words:

. . . Mas a Palavra de Deus
é a verdade. Por isso esta canção tem o nome que tem.

The final, climactic poem, "Para o Zé," is a love poem to Man, eternal and present. This love of Man is a love for the non-female, for everything that she, as a woman, needs in order to be complete:

te amo do modo mais natural, vero-romântico,
homem meu, particular homem universal.
Tudo que não é mulher está em ti, maravilha.

From the specific to the eternal Adélia Prado, woman, completes her universe with love.

As their titles suggest, the last two sections of *Bagagem*, "A SARÇA ARDENTE-I" and "A SARÇA ARDENTE-II" are closely related. Their interdependency is underscored by the fact that as epigraphs for the two Adélia uses a continuation of the same Biblical quote from Chapter 3 of Exodus. What she presents in these sections are, in fact, two groups of poems in which she recalls and re-creates her own past from a dual point of view. In the 14 poems of "A SARÇA ARDENTE-I" she evokes mostly happy memories of childhood; the 13 poems of "A SARÇA ARDENTE-II," on the other hand, recall mainly illness and death. What we have, once again, is the fundamental duality of *alegria-tristeza*, only somehow purified of the anguish of the first section of the book and therefore, by extension, accepted. As was the case with "AMOR E UM JEITO," besides complementing one another, each of these two sections is a unity unto itself while also forming part of the book as a whole. The subject matter of both was also anticipated in "O MODO POÉTICO."

Adélia introduces "A SARÇA ARDENTE-I" by paraphrasing from Exodus iii.2: "'Uma chama de fogo saía do meio de uma sarça que ardia sem se consumir.'" This perpetually burning bush anticipates her memories of childhood in the *roça* of Minas: an individual past recalled from the point of view of the present and eternalized in poetry. She opens the section with a poem entitled "Janela" in which she transforms the object and word into a symbolic aperture into the world she will depict:

Ó janela com tramela, brincadeira de ladrão,
claraboia na minha alma,
olho no meu coração.

There follows a series of poems—lyric, nostalgic, ironic too at times—that bring to life certain moments of her childhood,

frequently recreated in an almost Proustian way through the evocation of a minuscule sensation or detail. They are poems of sounds and taste and smells, poems about her parents, her cousins and her aunts, poems that reflect the special magic of a moment that has stamped itself upon the memory of a child. Throughout we feel the elusive presence of her mother, a mother-earth figure, cooking in the kitchen for her family. In this section Adélia offers us, above all, a portrait of childhood innocence, a joyous innocence only spoiled, in part, in the final poem, "Ensinarmento." Here the poet looks back upon her past with a more critical eye:

Minha mãe achava estudo
a coisa mais fina do mundo.
Não é,

she says:

A coisa mais fina do mundo é o sentimento.

In the last two verses she indicates what was lacking in her relationship to her mother:

Não me falou em amor.
Essa palavra de luxo.

If Adélia's mother withheld love, her father did not. This is obvious in "A SARÇA ARDENTE-II" which is, in essence, a series of elegiac love poems to the memory of her father. The section is prefaced by a continuation of God's revelation to Moses (Exodus iii.5) in which he says: "'Tira as sandálias de teus pés, porque a terra em que estás é uma terra sagrada.'" Adélia's portrait of her father is, in effect, that of a simple and loving man closely bound to the earth. Although she occasionally recalls happy memories before his illness, most of the 13 poems of this section describe dying, death and immortality in terms both universal and specific. Her memories extend from the horror of cancer to wonderful, private moments between father and daughter—moments which she closely associates with her present vocation as a poet. The opening verses of the first poem of the section, "O Homem permanecido," create a sensation of distant once-upon-a-time:

Era uma vez
uma venta fremente e um duro queixo.
Era uma vez um pisado de levantar pedra e poeira.

These verses introduce the moment in which death passes by, leaving a corpse, still recalled in fairytale terms:

Era uma vez um homem que está rijo e cantante,
sem o espírito e a lei da gravidade,
alegre de nenhuma graça.

In the poems that follow the memory of this *homem permanecido* slowly transforms itself into the image of her father, whose identity Adélia at first suggests, and eventually clarifies in the ninth poem, entitled "A Poesia," where she recalls the influence her father's love of words and popular rhymes was to have on her. In the penultimate poem, "Para perpétua memória," her father has died:

Depois de morrer, ressuscitou
e me apareceu em sonhos muitas vezes.

Here we find an echo of God speaking to Moses, as in the quote from Exodus. In the last poem of "A SARÇA ARDENTE-II," "As Mortes sucessivas," Adélia sums up and compares her reaction to three important deaths in her family—those of her sister and mother and finally the inconsolable memory of the death of her father—and ends by describing her present life ("as moitas onde existo") as "pura sarça ardente da memória." In this poem she also offers a condensation of her own life experience, thus bringing us from the past to the present and transporting us back, in a circular fashion, to the poems about herself and about the death of her parents at the start of "O MODO POÉTICO." The book is closed, and there only remains the "epilogue" to integrate the whole.

In "Alfândega" Adélia takes inventory of her entire life, weighing the pure, interior existence so important to her against the exterior standards and requirements of society. With irony she portrays herself as a passenger about to leave on a ship when stopped by customs officers. While she and they disagree, the boat departs. From her baggage—her life and, by extension, her poetry—she is forced to leave something as security. Among the numerous levels of interpretation offered by the poem it might be suggested that what Adélia had to leave behind was her "*livro irmão*"—*Bagagem*—the volume that now belongs to us.

. . . tenho meus prantos,
claridades atrás do meu estômago humilde
e forte voz pra cânticos de festa.

The voice of Adélia Prado: sensitive and strong. In the second poem of "O MODO POÉTICO," entitled "Grande desejo," a self-portrait from which these words are taken, our poet clearly indicates her intention to write a volume of poems, a book that she will carry with her the way one might carry baggage:

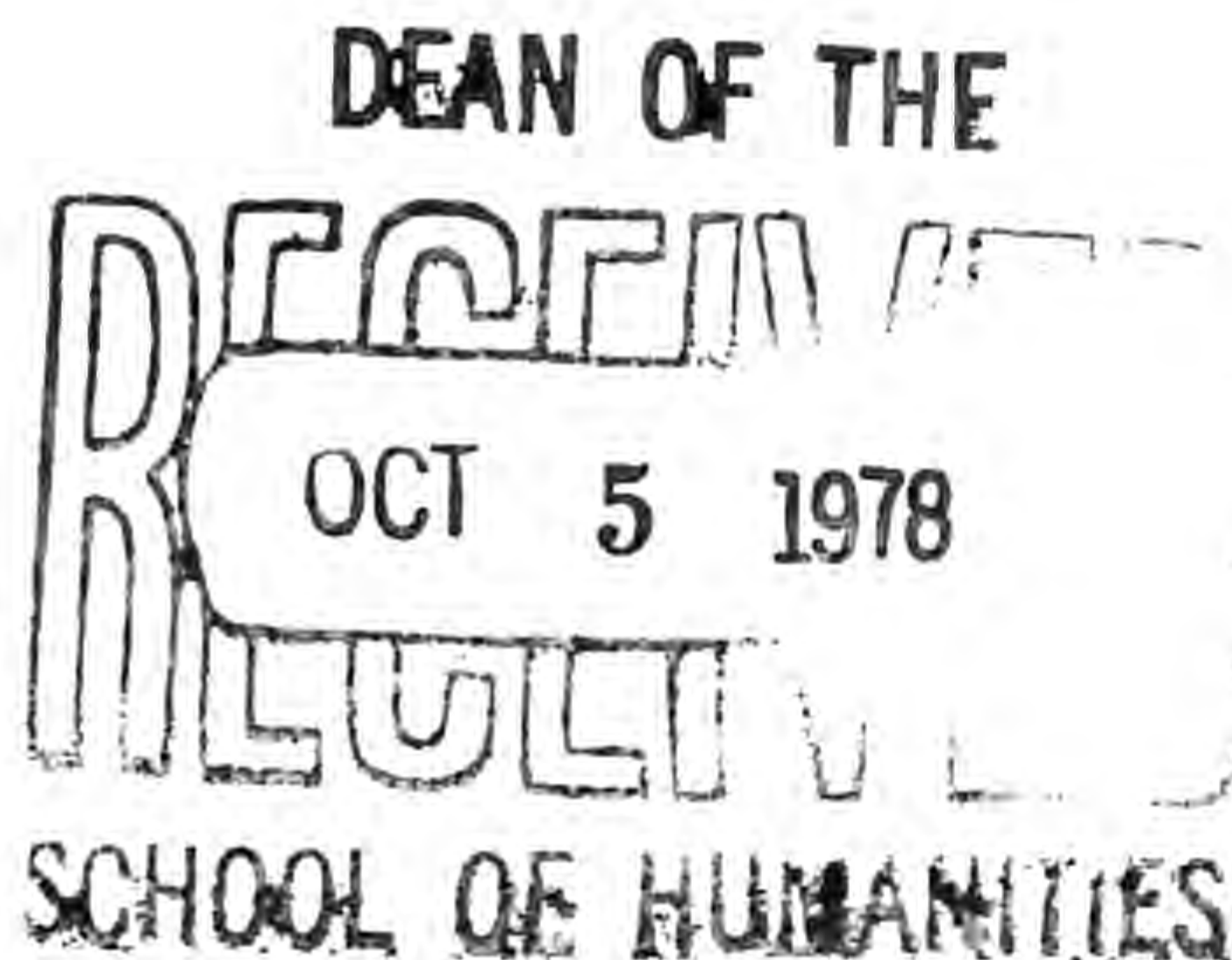
Quando escrever o livro com o meu nome
e o nome que eu vou pôr nele, vou com ele a uma igreja,
a uma lápide, a um descampado,
para chorar, chorar, e chorar,
requintada e esquisita como uma dama.

Adélia—*mulher do povo e mãe de filhos*; Adélia—*dama*. Perhaps the best description of Adélia—*poeta* is found in the first poem of

Bagagem. The poem is entitled "Com licença poética" and it would seem fitting to end this presentation of Adélia Prado's first volume of poetry by quoting it in its entirety:

Quando nasci um anjo esbelto,
desses que tocam trombeta, anunciou:
vai carregar bandeira.
Cargo muito pesado pra mulher,
esta espécie ainda envergonhada.
Aceito os subterfúgios que me cabem,
sem precisar mentir.
Não sou tão feia que não possa casar,
acho o Rio de Janeiro uma beleza e
ora sim, ora não, creio em parto sem dor.
Mas, o que sinto escrevo. Cumpro a sina.
Inauguro linhagens, fundo reinos
(dor não é amargura).
Minha tristeza não tem pedigree,
já a minha vontade de alegria,
sua raiz vai ao meu mil avô.
Vai ser coxo na vida, é maldição pra homem.
Mulher é desdobrável. Eu sou.

These verses declare explicitly Adélia's consciousness of her destiny as a woman born to be poet and of the art through which she is fulfilling this destiny.



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